K — Barry (C.)

AN

ESTIMATE

OF THE

THEATRICAL MERITS

Of the TWO

TRAGEDIANS

OF

CROW-STREET.

IN

A LETTER from a Gentleman in *Dublin*, to his Friend in *London*.

Singula quæque locum teneant ſortita decenter. HOR.

DUBLIN

Printed, and Sold by the Bookſellers.

MDCCLX.

BRITISH MUSEUM

AN

ESTIMATE

OF THE

THEATRICAL MERITS

Of the TWO

TRAGEDIANS

OF

CROW-STREET.

Dear WILL,

YOU can't forget the bickerings which, ſome time ago, prevail'd in *London* between the parties, which the *Gray's-Inn* Journal humourouſly ſtiles the *Garrickeans* and the *Barryiſts.* Had the author reſided here this winter, we would, probably, have been entertained with

ſome account of the *Moſſopians*; a ſect peculiar to the meridian of *Dublin*. It was hearing ſeveral late diſputes between theſe and the *Barryiſts*, put me on reflecting, *en paſſant*, upon affairs in the theatrical world; and on enquiring into the cauſes for ſuch a variety of opinions concerning excellence there. And when I had ſatisfy'd myſelf in every thing, but your concurrence, I could not help becoming, at leaſt, a candidate for it, by communicating to you the reſult of my thoughts on that ſubject; and alſo upon the method of eſtimating it, which I offer you, ſomewhat different from the prevailing one: for what any one likes moſt, that is, to him, abſolutely beſt; inſomuch that we generally make ourſelves the unerring ſtandard to meaſure theatrical merit withal. But is this a juſt method of proceeding? I think not: and, in literary productions, mankind think and act otherwiſe. The bulk of whom frankly own their ignorance of books; and never pretend to do any thing more

more than retail the deciſions of criticiſm. It was *Addiſon* firſt made ſhops and tea-tables reſound with the praiſes of *Milton*. Now his eulogium is traditional. Whereas all who ſee, applaud or condemn players as caprice dictates; and, ſeated on the bench of arrogance, paſs ſentence with all the vehemence of prejudice, partial experience, and crudity of taſte. The fine parts of playing always paſs unheeded or diſregarded. It is the pointed ſentence, or bitter ſarcaſm, that extort applauſe. Theſe are the moſt delectable pieces of entertainment to thoſe profound adepts in theatrical knowledge, known by the name of *ſpouters*, with whom too that blemiſh of tragedy, called *rants*, will eclipſe every beauty, and never fail to call down claps as loud as thunder. 'The 'warm, the paſſionate parts of tragedy, '(ſays Mr. *Addiſon*) are always moſt taking 'with an audience; for which reaſon we 'often ſee players pronouncing, in all the 'violence of action, ſeveral parts which

'the

'the author writ with the greateſt temper,
'and deſign'd they ſhould have been ſo
'acted. I have ſeen *Powell* often raiſe
'himſelf a loud clap by this artifice.'

Nor can we be ſurprized at the clumſy notions of an audience. The bulk of which, 'tis obvious, cannot but be void of taſte; and even of thoſe whoſe condition in life ſeems to promiſe an higher refinement in the arts, how few aſpire to any thing farther than a taſte for equipage and dreſs, the apt diſpoſition of well-choſen furniture, or the œconomy of a table? The genius of ſome may riſe to muſick; few have any reliſh for painting; and fewer ſtill for poeſy. And among the enamorato's of theſe arts how often do we ſee a knowledge of rules paſs for judgment, and propenſity uſurp the name of genius? But even where genius is, nothing can be hoped for without a proper cultivation. Taſte is the product of genius and erudition: that gives the matter;

matter; this the form; and is to genius what the chizzel is to the diamond, which never blazes till cut by art.

If we mark but the degrees of refinement in the individual, we ſhall find his ſentiments about the objects of the imagination as changeable and veering as the winds; and as unlike, at different periods, as thoſe of different perſons. The novice ſtands in torpid admiration of a ſign-poſt, who could not reliſh the cartoons: but teach him to draw, and gradually lead him on from forms moſt ſimple, through thoſe more complex, to juſt conceptions of nature, and he, in proportion to his improvement, is delighted with different ſpecies of imitation. He ſoon loaths the caracature and ridiculous, and can away with no deſign that does not adminiſter ideas of the beautiful and magnificent. And then, and not till then, is he in rapture with the bold ſtrokes of *Raphael*, and the frank

air

air of *Guido.* The ſame holds good in poeſy; 'tis from a long obſervation of nature, and through a continued ſcale of refinement, that *Shakeſpear* becomes our darling, and *Milton* our admiration. Nor are we to reaſon differently about playing; ſo that to pleaſe the vulgar, a degree of demerit is abſolutely requiſite; and men of taſte muſt, therefore, as neceſſarily diſapprove their approbations, as they will themſelves agree in the main of their opinions, which, from human imperfection, it is impoſſible they can in every point; for nature is the ſtandard to which all refer, according to their ideas of it; and could we diveſt ourſelves of every prejudice, our ſentiments would be rectitude or truth itſelf, as being totally coincident with nature.

We muſt then look out for ſome other criterion of theatrical merit than the ſuffrage of the million; and in ſo doing, we will

will inquire into two things, the dignity of the caſt of playing, and the ſpirit of the actor in exhibition. Now if, in the caſe before us, it be taken for granted, that our two excellent tragedians ſupport their very different caſts with equal ſpirit, our whole inquiry would be taken up in computing the dignity of the caſt. For which purpoſe it will be neceſſary to examine into the nature and movement of the paſſions; what are the adjuncts and characteriſticks of each, and what thoſe outward workings, whoſe exhibition catches the ſoul as with contagion, and fills it with imaginary griefs, or ſeizes it with ideal terrors. From which analyſis we may eaſily inveſtigate the comparative difficulty of imitation in each. But here let us premiſe, that as the generous affections are peculiar to our nature, and, therefore, of ſuperior dignity, it muſt be more arduous to imitate them, than thoſe which are common to us with the inferior ranks of being, in whom we ſee

malice, fury, and revenge; but gentle pity never touched their breaſts. And, in general, a greater capacity is required to expreſs the ſublime, the great, and the beautiful of every ſpecies, than the mean, the little, and deformed.

Love, grief, jealouſy, anger, indignation, and revenge are the principal paſſions that tragedy exhibits on the ſtage. Of all theſe anger is of the moſt violent character; its impreſſions are marked in every feature, geſture, and accent. It is not, therefore, hard to be copied; a ſtrong voice, and tolerable elocution, cannot fail to ſtir the blood. When 'the *Volſcians* are fluttered 'in *Corioli*,' the houſe is in a flame, and not a breaſt but beats in the cauſe of *Marcius*. Yet how inſipid is *Coriolanus* after *Alexander?* There is ſuch an uniformity of indignant pride in the *Roman*, that we are ſoon palled. His impotent rage vented in loud rants, together with the ſhouts of plebeians, does

does well nigh 'ſplit the very ears of the 'groundlings.' Whereas the *Grecian* hero is animated by a ſoul not leſs furious, and is, moreover, actuated by ſuch a variety of other paſſions; in the midſt of which he diſcovers ſuch a nobleneſs of nature, that, though drunk with proſperity, we cannot help, at once, admiring and pitying him. We weep more for the grief of *Alexander*, than for the death of *Clytus*. In fine, this character is ſo juſtly drawn by *Lee*, and ſo happily coloured (if I may uſe the expreſſion) by *Barry*, that it ſufficiently juſtifies the Taſte of *London* and *Dublin* in their reception of the play, though, in other reſpects, indifferent.

Love, though as violent in its effects as anger, is not ſo in its outward indications; for education has taught us to ſuppreſs the moſt violent ſymptoms. Whence the moſt ungovernable of the paſſions aſſumes the name and appearance of the pure, the gen-

tle, and the tender. For which reaſon it muſt be harder to imitate theſe placid movements of the ſoul, than the fury of reſentment. " Haud bene conveniunt ma-" jeſtas & amor," is as true of the mimick as real ſtage of life. So that the fineſt qualities of a player are neceſſary to prevent its appearing contemptible. Captain *Thraſo* cries, ' Damn him, but he ' hates whining!' and wonders how people can bear ſuch ſtuff. The ſentiments of generous love are ſo delicate, that they can make no impreſſion on the callous ſons of ſenſuality. How few, except the fair, weep at the death of *Romeo?* Yet never lover lived or died ſo well! *Barry* looks the lover better than any body; for he has the fineſt perſon, and ſmiles become him. Nor does he act it worſe than he looks it; for he has the greateſt melody in his voice, and a moſt pleaſing inſinuation in his addreſs. Now, *Moſſop* wants all theſe qualifications, and, therefore, he

makes

makes but a ſorry lover. *Oſmin* is, indeed, the only character of this caſt which he attempts: And in this he is more improper than any I have ſeen him ſuſtain. His diſlike to *Zara* carries him ſo far, that he clinches his fiſt at her noſe. But, in the priſon ſcene, how juſtly does he expreſs, with vehemence, his diſlike to ſlavery and chains?

To excite pity by ſhews of grief and affliction, is one of the moſt arduous taſks of a tragedian. 'Is it not monſtrous (ſays '*Shakeſpear*) that this player here ſhould 'in a fiction, in a dream of paſſion, ſo 'force his ſoul to his conceit, that, from 'her workings, all his viſage wann'd, tears 'in his eyes, diſtraction in his aſpect, a 'broken voice, and a function ſuiting with 'forms to his conceit.' Theſe are *Barry*'s excellencies; and in theſe he ſtands unrivalled. His mein and countenance are ſo expreſſive of grief, that, before he ſpeaks,

ſpeaks, we are diſpoſed to pity; but then his broken throb ſo wrings our ſoul with grief, that we are fain to ſolace ourſelves ith tears. Of this we have eminent inſtances in *Eſſex*, *Lear*, *Jaffier*, and almoſt every character he plays. Whereas, I do not remember a ſcene in which Mr. *Moſſop* excites pity by any of theſe means; here, in ſpight of art, he fails; "*ridendus* "*& ilia ducit.*" He has ſo much habituated himſelf to look pride and indignation, that their traces are now indelible: his countenance is as unſuſceptible of love and grief, as the tone of his voice is incapable of inſpiring tenderneſs or pity. But if the caſt be indignation, no body ſwells the heart ſo big with that paſſion: *Pierre* is ſufficient to prove this.

Jealouſy is made up of love, grief, and anxiety, (or, rather, 'tis an epitome of all the paſſions.) Revenge is a complication of pride, hatred, and reſentment. Theſe, we

we have ſeen, are much eaſier of imitation than the others; and, conſequently, jealouſy muſt be infinitely harder to copy than revenge. It muſt, likewiſe, be much more pleaſing in the repreſentation; inaſmuch as it participates of our nobler paſſions; whereas revenge ſprings from our moſt odious and deteſtable. The dignity and home-felt diſtreſs of *Othello*, intereſts us in his behalf; but we can never be brought to ſympathize with *Zanga*. And hence appears the reaſon why, notwithſtanding there is equal juſtice done to theſe characters, in their exhibition at *Crow-ſtreet*, yet *Barry* pleaſes ſo much more than *Moſſop*.

Terror is by none ſo well drawn as *Shakeſpear*; and, by him, no where ſo well as in *Macbeth*. In the ranting parts of this play, towards the end, *Moſſop* is not contemptible; but in the beginning, particularly all the ſecond act, he is by

no

no means *Macbeth*. Now here *Barry* is truly great; there is a mixture of remorſe and generoſity in *Macbeth*, which makes us rather pity than abhor him: we ſee him ſtruggling between honour and ambition ---- he ruminates on the baſeneſs of his purpoſes ---- and, for a while, all ſentiments of ambition are ſtifled by thoſe of duty. We cannot help ſympathizing with him in this conteſt, and rejoicing at the triumph of virtue ---- but his wife enters ---- ſhe ſpurs him on ---- and he proceeds ---- but with reluctance ---- his fancy racks and tortures him; it paints to him a bloody dagger ---- he reaſons on the reality of the viſion ---- and, at length, concludes ---- 'There's no ſuch thing.' *Barry*'s pronunciation of theſe words is inimitably fine; he ſpeaks like one who feels; *Moſſop* like one who ſtrives to feel.

And this leads me, inſenſibly, to conſider which of theſe players ſhines moſt in his caſt;

caſt; which I have, as yet, ſuppoſed they did with equal ſplendor, as is, in truth, the caſe, when the character (to ſpeak in a theatrical phraſe) comes to them; and this I take to be the caſe when the one acts either love, grief, jealouſy, or a ſudden generous warmth; and when the other plays an uniform determin'd rage, or indignation, or revenge. They then not only tranſcend every thing I have ſeen, but even my moſt elevated conceptions of playing. Yet muſt I, on the other hand, ſay, that *Barry* is ſometimes flat; and *Moſſop* often affected and hyper-tragical. Mere ſelf-love makes me wiſh Mr. *Moſſop* would not labour to make ſo much of every thing; (" *cupiat non pla-*" *cuiſſe nimis.*") When there is any thing in the ſentiment, he makes the moſt of it; and if it be pointed, he wings the arrow with its fulleſt force. But there is no play that has weight of ſentiment in every line; and, by force of elocution, to endeavour to ſupply it, is to give weight to lightneſs, 'tis attempting to ſling a feather.

Nobody ſpeaks the iraſcible parts better than him; for he has the ſtrongeſt voice; and, therefore, he is, methinks, too cholerick in his playing. And whether Mr. *Addiſon*'s remark (above-mentioned) on *Powell* may not juſtly be applied to him, I ſubmit to the judgment of the few.

I will next conſider our actors as they are, or are not, originals: for, *cæteris paribus*, here, as in other things, an original is ever to be preferred. Now, Mr. *Moſſop* is only a better *Sheridan*, for, on his plan, he ſeems to have modell'd himſelf; and has excell'd his maſter by greater ſtrength of voice alone. But *Barry*'s manner is intirely his own.

The laſt light in which I will view them, is, by ſuppoſing them to change parts: as for inſtance Mr. *Moſſop* to act *Caſtalio*, *Antony*, *Jaffier*, *Lothario*, &c. and Mr. *Barry* to act *Chamont*, *Ventidius*, *Pierre*, *Horatio*, &c. In none of theſe can we ſpeak from experience,

experience, (for notwithſtanding we have ſeen Mr. *Barry* change from the gay *Lothario* to the grave and ſententious *Horatio* with ſucceſs, yet we have never ſeen Mr. *Moſſop* attempt *Lothario*) but from conjecture, by ſeeing them do parts, upon the whole, different. In this view they ſtrike me thus ---- When *Barry* is angry, ſo am I: When *Moſſop* is ſo, I burn with reſentment. ---- When *Barry* contemns you, I deſpiſe you: But, when *Moſſop* does ſo, I almoſt deteſt you. ---- If *Barry* chides, it is with the open ſincerity of a friend: *Moſſop* reproves with all the moroſeneſs of a cynick ---- and, when he commends, his head alone ſupplies him words. ---- *Barry*'s commendation ſeems to be the overflowing of the heart. ---- Does *Moſſop* weep? I can't but laugh: But when *Barry* grieves, who can refrain from tears? ---- *Moſſop*'s declamation is too ſtudied: *Barry*'s is not enough ſo. ---- When *Barry*'s tender wooing melts a frozen breaſt, I applaud the yielding fair one: but can't

help thinking her deluded by a rank imagination, who is prevail'd on by ſuch a ſuitor as *Moſſop*.

Thus have I curſorily endeavoured to lay before you ſome propoſitions which may ſerve as principles for inſtituting a more full eſtimate. It was for this end I treated this ſubject in the manner I have done: for I am not ignorant that any thing, even like principles, are too abſtract to be entertaining; and that examples are, of all things, the moſt ſtriking. But I alſo know, that without ſome ſolid foundation whereon to reſt our opinions, ſome fixed maxims whereto we may refer, nothing is more impertinent than an eſſay of any ſort. Caſtles, built on quickſands, are not more unſtable, nor the phantoms of phrenſy more chimerical. In my next, however, I may be more particular, and, perhaps, more palatable, by analyſing the capital parts of theſe tragedians; and by ſhewing not only the general characteriſticks of each paſſion, but alſo

thoſe

thoſe marks by which the different ſpecies of the ſame are contradiſtinguiſhed. As (for examples) how the tender, conjugal affection of *Jaffier* differs from the diſſolved, uxorious paſſion of *Antony*; or how the hot and jealous choler of *Lear* is diſtinguiſhed from the haughty and ſavage rage of *Coriolanus*. Nor will I ſtop here, but purſue the paſſions in their ſhifting and veering from one to another; for in a due tranſition conſiſts the chief excellence of an actor. And, from this principle, it will appear plainly, that, of all iraſcible characters, *Lear* is the moſt difficult to act; and that too in as great a proportion, as it is the beſt drawn character of that caſt. Nor will it be leſs evident that the part of *Jaffier* is infinitely harder to ſupport than that of his friend *Pierre*: For there is no tranſition required in him, but from rage to indignation; nor a paſſion to be copied, but thoſe juſt named. Whereas almoſt every paſſion of the ſoul is exerted in *Jaffier*, and theſe too ſucceed ſo quickly, that they prevent our expectation. We now ſee him depreſſed

with

with a load of anguiſh, and ſuccumbing to every ſuggeſtion of deſpair ---- ſoon raging with reſentment ---- then reſolving the death of his unfortunate wife ---- and anon ſunk in the embraces of his beloved *Belvidera*. But I vainly attempt to excite ideas, which nothing but ſeeing Mr. *Barry* act *Jaffier* could raiſe!

I will then no longer tire you on this ſubject, but defer what I have farther to ſay concerning our excellent tragedians till my next. When I will alſo give you ſome thoughts on ſuch of the other actors and actreſſes as ſeem worthy of criticiſm. And ſince I have mentioned theſe, I cannot help, in the mean time, taking notice of an actreſs, to whom art and nature ſeem to contend which would be more liberal. Mrs. *Fitzhenry* is whatever ſhe repreſents! Her favourite caſt, however, is raiſing terror. And when ſhe would rouſe up our reſentments, her eyes ſo lighten, her voice ſo thunders, and her breaſt is in ſuch a tempeſt,

that

that we are almoſt borne away in an hurricane of paſſion. Could ſhe look affliction and tenderneſs as well as ſhe does the warmer feelings, I would pronounce her the ſovereign mover of the ſoul. Yet, even in theſe, ſo fully penetrated is ſhe with a juſt idea of her character, that, when ſhe acts the part of anguiſh, her eyes are brim full of tears; and this ſhe ſeconds by a tone (as in every thing elſe) ſo emphatical, that they muſt have a frozen heart, indeed, whom ſhe would not melt into compaſſion. Nor can I forget the tragick excellencies of Mrs. *Dancer*; a young actreſs, who looks tenderneſs and diſtreſs better than any body; and acts them paſſing well. But the ſock fits her ſtill better than the buſkin: and had ſhe gone earlier in life on the ſtage, ſhe would have been, by this, a finiſh'd actreſs. To ſay any thing of Mr. *Woodward*, in this place, would be idle, as it would require a long epiſtle to enumerate his rare qualities. *Adieu.*

I am, &c.

4 AP 54